



The Ambassador Mari Carmen Aponte

She plays the key role of intermediary between the El Salvador and U.S. governments.

by RICHARD LARSEN, Deputy Managing Editor

"I'm not sure anything really prepares you to be an ambassador," said Mari Carmen Aponte, who has been the U.S. ambassador to El Salvador since September 2010. "This is by far the most complicated and challenging role I have ever undertaken."

As the head of the diplomatic mission to El Salvador, she is responsible for nearly 500 employees from more than a dozen U.S. government agencies and a multimillion-dollar budget. She not only oversees U.S. foreign policy in the Central American nation, but also works to ensure the safety and well-being of the thousands of Americans who live and travel in El Salvador.

Ms. Aponte's prominent position and efforts to advance the Hispanic community earned her a spot as a finalist in *HispanicBusiness* magazine's Woman of the Year 2011.

Ambassadors are the links between foreign governments and the United States.

"Everything I say, everything I do is interpreted as a reflection of the views of the United States in a country where our country is seen as an important point of reference—politically, economically and socially," Ms. Aponte wrote in an e-mail interview with *HispanicBusiness* magazine.

El Salvador is committed to free markets and careful fiscal management, according to the CIA's "World Fact Book."

On Jan. 1, 2001, the U.S. dollar became legal tender in El Salvador. More than 300 U.S. companies have a permanent presence there or work through representative offices.

Though Ms. Aponte feels nothing can really prepare someone to be an ambassador, she does have a well-rounded skill set.

"As a White House Fellow (1979) with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development," she wrote, "I learned much about the making of public policy and developed the leadership skills that have served me well in El Salvador."

From 2001 through 2004, Ms. Aponte was executive director of the Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration.

She is the first Puerto Rican woman to serve as a U.S. ambassador, for which she said she is "extremely proud."

Ms. Aponte holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Rosemont College, a master's degree in theater from Villanova University and a doctor of laws degree from Temple University.

Ms. Aponte attributes her success to the influential role model her father provided. "He taught me the importance of persistence," she wrote, "and the personal satisfaction that comes from achieving one's goals through one's own hard work."

Ms. Aponte strongly encourages Hispanic women to



Photo courtesy of U.S. Embassy in El Salvador

"Hispanic women can do anything.
We're everywhere."

—Mari Carmen Aponte, U.S. ambassador,
El Salvador

consider careers in government service, especially in the Foreign Service. "It is very important," she wrote, "that the face we show the world at our embassies and consulates abroad reflect the diversity of the United States."

And what about Hispanic women eager to get ahead in their chosen careers?

"Find your passion and then be prepared to work hard to achieve your goals," she wrote.

Although honored to be included in the accomplished group of women who were nominated for the 2011 Woman of the Year, she was not surprised at the impressive credentials of the nominees.

After all, she concluded: "Hispanic women can do anything. We're everywhere." ■■